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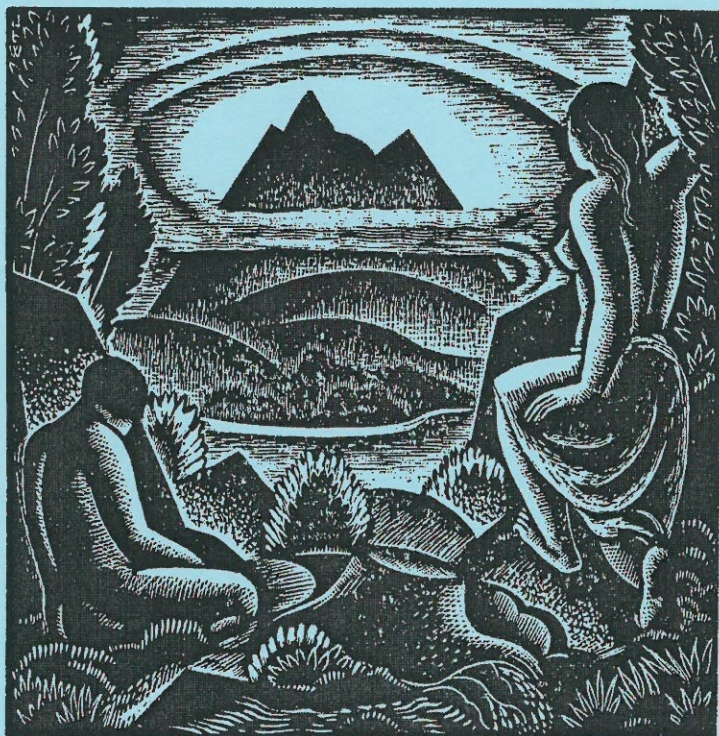
# Challenging Religious Dogma: A History of Free Thought

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# **CHALLENGING RELIGIOUS DOGMA**



**A HISTORY OF FREE THOUGHT**

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## **A History of Free Thought**

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Special Collections Library  
University of Michigan  
7th Floor, Hatcher Graduate Library

## INTRODUCTION

Free-thinking: The free exercise of reason in matters of religious belief, unrestrained by deference to authority.

*Oxford English Dictionary*

Throughout history there have been individuals whose personal beliefs did not match those promulgated by the religious authorities of their culture. These individuals are known as free-thinkers because they challenged the teachings of religion. They did not all meet with the same response, many enduring the Spanish Inquisition, imprisonment, and various degrees of censorship, while others, such as those enjoying the separation of church and state in the present-day United States, have had a great degree of freedom.

This exhibit traces the roots of freethinking in Europe and the United States back to the ancient world and up to the late 20th century. The early materials in it illustrate the strength of our general rare books collections, with marvelous copies of works by Aristotle, Copernicus, and Galileo, as well as Locke, Hume, and Rousseau. Most of the 19th and 20th century materials on display come from the holdings of the Labadie Collection, founded through a generous gift of the personal papers and library of Jo Labadie, the "gentle Anarchist" of Detroit, in 1911. The Labadie Collection is one of the richest assemblages of primary sources of social protest literature in the world.

"Challenging Religious Dogma" was conceived, written, and designed by Edward Weber and Julie Herrada, Curator and Assistant Curator of the Labadie Collection, respectively. Its primary aims are to trace the history of notable free-thinkers important in fields such as philosophy, literature, political activism, and science, and to encourage open discussion of important issues in the University.

Peggy Daub  
Head, Special Collections Library

## CASE 1

### THE ANCIENT WORLD, the RENAISSANCE, and the BEGINNING of SCIENTIFIC ASTRONOMY

Free thought can be considered to begin when individuals questioned supernatural explanations of the world around them, but we have no historical record of this before the ancient Greeks. The oracles and priests who divined omens were, however, not a powerful caste allied to the mechanism of the state, and had no organized way to suppress dissenters. In the sixth and fifth centuries BCE, early philosophers began to theorize about the nature of the world and question beliefs in the supernatural. Heraclitus and Democritus believed that ever-changing atoms underlay seeming permanence, but their writings survive only in quoted fragments. Of the two great Greek philosophers whose works were preserved, Plato saw truth through metaphysics whereas Aristotle had a closer kinship with the secular outlook. He tried to encompass all thought in various treatises. *De Natura* incorporates many fables but represents his attempt to investigate nature with common sense.

Thomas Aquinas, the eminent Christian intellect of the thirteenth century, was stimulated by Aristotle, much of whose thought he incorporated in *Summa Theologica*. The Aristotelian elements provided bases not only for logical argument but for a synthesis between later scientific inquiries and a metaphysic for the origin of the universe. Under such conditions, a believer might find that investigations of nature would bring into question the literal accuracy of sacred writings.

Aristotle. *Opera*. Venice: Aldus Manutius, 1495.

## Lucretius (c.99 - c.55 BCE)

Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura*, a long philosophical poem powerful in its concentration of statement and beautiful in its imagery, was influenced both by the atomic theory of Democritus and the philosophy of Epicurus. It posits a universe composed of ceaselessly active atoms that change spontaneously and without guidance. The soul is also composed of atoms and perishes with the body. The gods exist but dwell apart, far away, in thoughtful tranquility, surrounded by beauty. They are not responsible for good and evil in the world, and it is useless to beseech them. Lucretius declares that religion has persuaded mankind to practice a host of evils, of which he mentions human and animal sacrifice, and terror of death and hell. Intoning Epicurus, he says that pleasure is the goal of life, a pleasure not connected with heedless sensual indulgences but with garnering wisdom and living according to an ethic that does not exact retribution from others.

Lucretius is the only poet whose philosophical work has continued to live, not only for the exceptional intellectual interest, but for the force and beauty of his verse.

Lucretius. *De Rerum Natura Libri Sex*. Chelsea: St. J. Hornby, 1913.

The decline and fall of the Roman Empire brought political, social, and economic chaos as the European world descended into the Dark Ages. The greatest repository of ancient learning, the Alexandria Library, was destroyed. Since the church preserved the learning that survived through the centuries, it controlled education. Just as kings and nobles guarded against external and internal enemies, the increasingly powerful church, allied to the state, zealously sought out heresy.

## Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543)

Born in Torun, Poland, the pioneer of modern astronomy enjoyed an ample and independent, lifelong income by virtue of his position as a canon of the cathedral chapter of Frombork (obtained through the influence of his uncle, the Bishop of Varmia).

Copernicus learned the established Ptolemaic astronomy, with the earth as the center of the universe, at the University of Krakow. Sent to Italy in 1496, he studied canon law at the University of Bologna and medicine at the University of Padua, finally obtaining a doctoral degree in canon law from the University of Ferrara in 1503. Throughout this time he avidly pursued his avocation of astronomy, observed a lunar eclipse in Rome, and lectured on mathematics to a learned group. Returning to Varmia, he spent the remaining forty years of his life serving his chapter.

In 1513 he had a roofless tower built from which he could make astronomical observations, and already in 1514 he circulated among his trusted friends the first draft of his astronomical system in which he asserted that the earth moved around the sun. In it, he omitted the name of Aristarchus, a source who had been accused of impiety, although he included other ancient Greeks. Knowing that his ideas would cause great repercussions in the Church, Copernicus carefully arranged for the publishing of *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium*, to be done after his death, even though he probably completed it as early as 1530.

Copernicus, Nicolaus. *De Revolutionibus orbium coelestium, libri VI*. Nuremberg: J. Petreius, 1543.

## Galileo Galilei (1564-1642)

Copernicus had first advanced the idea of a universe in which the earth is not the center. His disciple Galileo carried astronomical research much further and, publishing during his lifetime, suffered the persecution Copernicus strove to avoid.

Born at Pisa, the son of a noted composer, Galileo gained the chair of mathematics at Pisa in 1589, where he began his first experiments in weight and motion. Having become unpopular with the university and

political authorities, Galileo moved to the chair of mathematics at Padua, a relatively free environment under the government of Venice.

Hearing of the invention of the telescope in 1609, he devised swift improvements and then trained his telescope on the heavens in 1610, the first human to see the mountainous surface of the moon, the composition of the Milky Way as separate stars, many new fixed stars, and four satellites of Jupiter as described in *Sidereus Nuncius* (Venice, 1610). With the sudden fame resulting from this publication, he became mathematician and philosopher to the Grand Duke of Tuscany and chief mathematician at the University of Pisa, but as a favorite of the court he soon had enemies. In his *Letters on Sunspots* (1613) Galileo declared support of the Copernican system for the first time. Galileo argued in his *Letter to Christina* (composed 1615, published 1636) that neither the Bible nor nature could speak falsely, and that the investigation of nature was the province of the scientist, while theologians should reconcile the scientific discoveries to the Bible. Unfortunately, a papal commission decided in favor of the Ptolemaic system, and Galileo was ordered not to defend the Copernican (1616).

Galileo then spent several years composing *The Dialogue Concerning the Two World Systems*, in which an educated layman is asked to evaluate the arguments outlined by rival proponents for the Ptolemaic and Copernican systems. Unable to get the papal imprimatur for this book, Galileo had it quickly printed in Florence (1632). Suddenly, the order came for the printer to sell no more and Galileo to present himself before the Inquisition in Rome. He was condemned, the *Dialogue* placed on the Index (of forbidden books), and after abjuring the Copernican "heresy" Galileo was sentenced to life imprisonment (soon after converted to permanent house arrest). Just after professing his recantation, Galileo uttered the words "Eppur si muove" — "But it does move." Sent to Siena, his friendly and encouraging reception by the archbishop angered his persecutors, who had him banished to his own villa near Florence. Becoming blind, Galileo completed only one new work, printed abroad, before his death in 1638. The imposing tomb projected for him by the Grand Duke and frowned on by the Church was deferred for a century. Galileo is one of the most illustrious victims in the warfare between science and theology.

Galilei, Galileo. *Dialogo*. Florence: G.B. Landini, 1632.

## CASE 2

### THE ENGLISH EMPIRICISTS and SKEPTICS

#### Francis Bacon (1561-1626)

Francis Bacon's ambitious career was a striking ascent during the Elizabethan and Jacobean ages. His wide learning, legal knowledge, and verbal acuity made him a valuable if undependable ally at Elizabeth's court; under James I he became successively Solicitor General, Attorney General, Lord Keeper of the Great Seal, and Chancellor. Since Parliament hated Bacon as the most able advocate of James I, twenty-three charges of corruption of justice were brought against him. Acknowledging his guilt in accepting gifts but denying that these had influenced his judgement, Bacon surrendered to the House of Lords and was fined forty thousand pounds, committed to the Tower (but released within four days by royal order) and forbidden any public office. Thereafter, the greatest intellect of his time devoted even more time to expounding his ideas.

Bacon had already gained fame with *The Proficiency and Advancement of Learning* (1603-1605) and shortly before his disgrace had prepared his plan, *Instauratio Magna*. He proposed that knowledge should advance without preconceived ideas from the ancient philosophers and while he exempted theology from his methods, he advocated investigations into nature with inductive methods and experimentation. His *Novum Organum* would displace the ancient *Organum* of Aristotle, with its logical syllogisms. His final work, *New Atlantis*, describes a utopia in which an island is governed by learned men, scientists, economists, technicians, physicians, and philosophers who live in a secular aggregation of observatories, laboratories, libraries, and zoological and botanical gardens. Bacon died as a result of making an experiment about decomposition of flesh in cold winter weather.

Bacon's influence was shortly felt in the establishment of the Royal Society for Improving Natural Knowledge (1660), in which free debate greatly advanced the diffusion of scientific discoveries. Leibniz, discoverer of calculus, hailed Bacon, as did the French philosophers in the next century;

the *Encyclopédie* was dedicated to him. As a philosopher of science Bacon's influence has extended to our present age.

Bacon, Francis. *The Two Bookes of Francis Bacon. Of the Proficiency and Advancement of Learning, Divine and Humane*. London: T. Purfoot, 1605.

#### John Locke (1632-1704)

Growing up in an age of violent revolution and regicide, John Locke became the advocate of moderation and tolerance while expounding views in several fields that made him the most influential philosopher of the later seventeenth century. From his Puritan father he imbibed the ideas of representative government and popular sovereignty. Becoming deeply versed in the classics, he remained at Oxford as a don for many years, acquired an admiration for the growing sciences, and became a friend and confidant of important political figures. As Secretary to the Council of Trades and Plantations, Locke helped Lord Shaftesbury propose a draft constitution for Carolina (then not divided) that included freedom of conscience. After Shaftesbury's fall from office (1675) Locke traveled to France, where in Cassendi's philosophy he found the comparison of a newly born child's mind to a tabula rasa, or clean slate.

With his political views under grave suspicion for subversion, Locke fled Oxford for Holland in 1683, where he wrote his famous *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, denying innate ideas and presenting a lasting contribution to psychology in which data from the senses are transformed into concepts. With the success of the Glorious Revolution, in which he played a part, Locke returned to England, where he had a wide succession of offices. In 1690 his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* was finally published, as well as his two *Treatises on Government*, cornerstones of democratic practice and libertarian philosophy. Government has no other end but the preservation of property, he declared, and all other inflictions of the law are repressive of freedom. In America his doctrines had particular influence on the Founding Fathers, one consequence being the separation of church and state. Locke's *Letter Concerning Toleration*, strongly attacked, urged full rights for expression of religious beliefs, exempting only religions that endorsed human sacrifice or demanded allegiance to a foreign power. Spengler praises Locke somewhat extravagantly in declaring that the entire Western Enlightenment is of English origin.



Locke, John. *A Letter Concerning Toleration*. London: Printed for A. Churchill, 1689.

## Edward Gibbon (1737-1794)

Born into a prosperous family of Putney, Gibbon was a precocious child who suffered from lifelong delicate health, which may account for his remark that at Oxford he was "too young and bashful to enjoy like a manly Oxonian the taverns and bagnios of Covent Garden." The Oxford authorities would have regarded these dissipations indulgently, but Gibbon was expelled for his conversion to Roman Catholicism in 1753. His horrified father packed him off to a pastor at Lausanne, who, in attacking Catholicism, persuaded Gibbon to re-embrace the Anglican faith - but the real effect on Gibbon was to destroy his faith in any creed.

During the Seven Years War Gibbon held a commission in the Hampshire militia and from 1774 to 1783 was a dutiful Tory member of parliament, who finally rebelled against sending more troops to America in 1778. With the publication in 1776 of the first volume of his *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Gibbon gained rapid and enduring fame.

With his immense erudition Gibbon had sought a grand historical subject, considering at various times a history of Florence, or of the Swiss cantons. In October, 1764, musing in the ruins of the Capitol in Rome, he heard barefoot friars singing in what had been the temple of Jupiter - a transition that gave him the striking subject for his life's monumental work, considered at the pinnacle of creations in world history. Gibbon's magisterial style is completely suited to the monumentality of his subject. As a literary masterpiece as well as a crowning work of history, Gibbon's "luminous pages" have been read by millions. He has, however, outraged millions of its readers, beginning with the famous fifteenth and sixteenth chapters on the rise of Christianity. To Gibbon the early Christians were a dirty, disorderly rabble, the success of whose fanaticism spelled the ruin of the old Roman virtues that had created and maintained the Roman empire, the seat of a great civilization. His irony and sarcasm were never lacking to bring religion into contempt. In his concluding chapter Gibbon states, "I have described the rise of barbarism and religion." J. B. Bury, historian of the free thought movement, feels that Gibbon's mocking created many more

religious skeptics than all the direct attacks upon religious dogmas.

Gibbon, Edward. *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. London: W. Strahan, 1777.

## David Hume (1710-1776)

Raised in the strict Calvinist version of Scotch Presbyterianism, Hume reacted strongly by becoming a freethinker in his teens. Locke was one influence on his views, but he was also living in a world in which religion was being undermined by the deists Thomas Woolston (1669-1733), Matthew Tindal (1657-1733), and Conyers Middleton (1683-1750), as well as by the philosophers Shaftesbury (1671-1713) and Bolingbroke (1678-1751).

Hume, however, went much farther than preceding philosophers in his *A Treatise on Human Nature* (1739), in which he accepted Locke's empiricism but denied mind as an entity, stating that we have only series of sensuous impressions turned into perceptions that remain in perpetual flux. As for "reason," enthroned by philosophers, this ability comes into play only in the service of our passions. Our moral sense comes not from a deity but from sympathetic fellow-feeling, for man has always been a social animal. *An Enquiry Concerning the Human Understanding* (1748) and *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751) enlarge upon his earlier work, listing obstacles to Christian beliefs such as the many evils in life, the sanguinary record of history, and the calm indifference of nature to man's calamities.

Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, written in 1751, presents the conversational arguments of three persons: Demea, who defends orthodoxy, Cleanthes, the optimistic deist, and Philo, who opposes both, claiming that reason cannot prove the existence of God or offer explanations of the workings of the world. His friends pleaded with Hume not to publish this, and he acquiesced, but much of his iconoclastic thought went into *Four Dissertations* (1757). The original *Dialogues*, along with two other essays, one dismissing immortality, the other favoring voluntary suicide, were withheld until after Hume's death.

Hume's equable disposition had, in fact, earned him surprising honors. Although the orthodox party vigorously attacked him as an infidel,



he was elected Keeper of the Library of the Faculty of Advocates in Edinburgh (1752), the salary less important to him than access to thirty thousand learned volumes.

In person the corpulent image of bonhomie, Hume had resolved early in life never to reply to any criticism. In his deathbed fragment of autobiography he does speak of "the petulance, arrogance, and scurrility" displayed by some of his religious opponents. Curious to find any symptoms of religious belief on Hume's deathbed, the visiting Boswell found him quite composed in his atheism, declaring that immortality was a "very gloomy" idea.

Hume, David. *Four Dissertations. I. The Natural History of Religion. II. Of the Passions. III. Of Tragedy. IV. Of the Standard of Taste.* London: Printed for A. Millar, 1757.

## Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797)

The tragic life of Mary Wollstonecraft is a case history of the calamities that could overrun the woman rebel. Her brutal, drunken, and improvident father was a prototype of the men Mary found in the homes of relatives and friends. Her attempts at independence by running a school or being a governess foundered. Hack literary work in London was no more remunerative, but Wollstonecraft found stimulating intellectual company who shared her enthusiasm for the French Revolution, which she determined to view first hand. While this pilgrimage enabled her to escape the consequences of her passion for the painter, Fuseli, she became entangled with Gilbert Imlay, an American Revolutionary officer, who thoroughly exploited and mistreated her. Mrs. Wollstonecraft, as she now called herself, returned to England with their daughter Fanny in 1795, still unable to break with Imlay. Finally she accepted the protection of the philosopher William Godwin and when three months pregnant, reluctantly agreed to marry him. She died from the efforts of childbirth, the daughter being Mary, who became Shelley's wife and the youthful author of *Frankenstein*.

Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (London, 1792) is a milestone in the feminist movement. Previously certain women (and men) had pleaded that women be considered intelligent creatures and given access to a life outside the domestic circle through education; but Wollstonecraft is the first to speak of it as a natural right as defined by

Rousseau. Her demands were surely moderate, indeed inadequate, but the warmly emotional tone gave force to them and aroused angry opposition. After speaking of society's trivialization of the position of women and their lack of legal redress, she states that upon investigation of these issues, reason would "loudly demand JUSTICE for one half of the human race."

As a child of the French Revolution, Wollstonecraft abjured the religious sects of her day and on her prolonged deathbed never sought religious consolation. William Godwin, her husband, himself an atheist, indicates that Mary believed only in a god that infused creation, the pantheism of the succeeding romantic movement.

Wollstonecraft, Mary. *Memoirs and Posthumous Works of Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin.* Dublin: Printed by T. Burnside for J. Rice, 1798.

## Thomas Paine (1737-1809)

Born into the family of a poor Quaker corset maker, Paine had little formal schooling, adopting the family trade at thirteen. A great variety of occupations followed, Paine's versatility and un-Quaker-like pugnacity fortified by wide reading. Probably his efforts to secure pay-raises for his fellow excisemen resulted in his dismissal and consequent bankruptcy, after which he decided, armed with letters of introduction to Franklin, to try his fortunes in Philadelphia. Journalism proved to be a fortunate metier and Paine made history with his pamphlet, *Common Sense* (1776), a powerful argument for a declaration of independence of the thirteen colonies already struggling in their war against the mother country. 120,000 copies were sold in less than three months, in a country with a population of less than four million; a total of half a million were eventually printed. In the misfortunes of the war, Paine stiffened the American resolve with his series of pamphlets, *The Crisis* (1776-1783), and was rewarded, even lionized, in the years following victory.

In 1787 his invention of an iron bridge, which he despaired of seeing constructed in the United States, brought his return to England. His revolutionary zeal was again ignited by the fall of the Bastille (1789). When Burke's powerful denunciation of the French Revolution appeared late in 1790, Paine replied stinging with *The Rights of Man* (1791-1792) in which he stated that only a republican government, with a written constitution

and a bill of rights, could be trusted to guarantee and maintain fundamental rights of liberty and property. More than 200,000 copies were sold before the British government suppressed it, convicted Paine of treason (December 1792), and outlawed him. Paine, already in France, had been elected to the National Convention in September and attached himself to the moderate republicans of the Girondist faction. Their sway was brief, swept away by the Jacobins in the following June, and Paine ceased to attend the assembly subordinate to a tyrannical government. He spoke against the execution of Louis XVI and paid by forfeiting his French citizenship and parliamentary immunity. The official outlaw in England was then imprisoned as a citizen of a country at war with France (December 1793). Never brought to trial, Paine was released through the efforts of James Monroe, the American minister, the following November. Restored to his seat in the Convention, he reiterated his faith in the rights of man, but with his poor command of the language, France was a foreign country to him.

With the English navy supreme on the seas, Paine could not risk a voyage to the United States until the peace of Amiens in 1802. He returned to a country that was less aware of his services to it twenty years before than resentful of his attacks on George Washington and angered by his philosophical work, *The Age of Reason* (1794-1796). It is because of this latter work, although not from reading it, that Theodore Roosevelt called Paine "a filthy little atheist." Paine was actually a deist but he denied supernaturalism, and disparaged "Christian mythology." Paine made no effort to court popular approval or come to terms because of his declining health. Proud of being an outcast and consoled by the bottle, he was refused interment in consecrated ground and buried in a corner of his farm in New Rochelle.

Paine, Thomas. *The Age of Reason: Being an Investigation of True and Fabulous Theology*. Paris: Barrois, 1794.

## CASE 3

### THE FRENCH CENTURY OF ENLIGHTENMENT DEISTS and ATHEISTS

#### Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle (1657-1757)

A nephew of Corneille, Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle published plays and poetry that rarely rise above period interest; his true originality is shown in his occasional speculative writings. *L'Origine des Fables*, composed at the age of twenty-three but not published until the relaxation of censorship forty-some years later, advances the idea that primitive man thought of gods when confronted by overwhelming natural forces. His European fame came just a few years later with his *Dialogues des Morts*, amusing, worldly conversations between dead worthies such as Homer and Aesop, Socrates and Montaigne. By publishing his imaginary voyage *Relation de l'Île de Bornéo*, Fontenelle barely escaped arrest when authorities saw through the anagrams of Eenege and Mréo (Geneva and Rome), lands engaged in silly verbal strife. With his charming and witty *Entretiens sur la Pluralité des Mondes* (1686) he popularized the still largely debatable Copernican astronomy. Two years later Fontenelle issued anonymously *L'Histoire des Oracles*, in which the claims of pagan miracles were explained away with a persuasiveness that applied to all forms of supernaturalism. His election to the French Academy in 1691 and his forty-odd years as "perpetual secretary" of the Académie des Sciences gave Fontenelle a secure position to move in the highest social and intellectual circles. Because of his extreme longevity the series of *éloges* he composed for famous Frenchmen comprise a review of the fermenting intellectual life in the first five decades of the Enlightenment.

Fontenelle, M. de (Bernard Le Bovier). *A Plurality of Worlds*. John Glanvill's Translation, With a Prologue by David Garnett. London: The Nonesuch Press, 1929.

## Voltaire (pseudonym of François Marie Arouet, 1694-1778)

Born into a cultural middle-class family, and given a classical education by the Jesuits, Voltaire gave up law for the more precarious career in literature. After two brief stays in the Bastille for writings offensive to the court, he finally went into exile in England in 1726. There he was impressed by the breadth of civil liberties and the intellectual stimulation of Locke and Newton. His *Letters Concerning the English Nation* (1733), which was banned when it appeared in French (1734), initiated the Anglophilia that kept the intellectuals of both countries on warm terms, though their nations were often at war with each other.

On his return to France (1729) Voltaire began to publish the plays that gave him a commanding position in French literature. Meeting Mme Du Châtelet, whose intellectual interests corresponded to his own (she wrote the first French treatise on Newton), Voltaire formed a very happy liaison that encouraged his incredible productivity. In 1750 he was installed at Frederick the Great's court as the intellectual lion, which produced the predictable clash between two unbending and free-speaking personalities. Through the influence of Mme de Pompadour, Voltaire was made Royal Historiographer, Gentleman of Louis XV's bedchamber, and member of the French Academy, but these dignities did not weigh against his ceaseless work for the *Encyclopédie*, his own skeptical *Dictionnaire Philosophique* (1764) and his prolific polemical writings: Voltaire found it imperative to live on or just over the French border of Switzerland.

In 1762 the torture and execution of Jean Calas, a Toulouse Protestant falsely accused of murdering his son to prevent conversion to Catholicism, propelled Voltaire's final crusade — a protracted war against religious bigotry which drew forth his memorable *Traité sur la Tolérance* (1763). As a deist Voltaire opposed the atheism and materialism of Helvétius and D'Holbach: "If God did not exist, he would have to be invented." He was, however, otherwise a skeptic, for credulity is assailed throughout his ever-popular work, *Candide* (1759).

At age 84 Voltaire came to Paris in a triumphal progress to witness the first performance of his final tragedy, *Irène*. With his strength giving out, a last battle ensued about his fitness for Christian burial. Voltaire refused to sign a general retraction of his writings and submitted the following declaration: "I die adoring God, loving my friends, not hating my enemies, and detesting persecution." The centrality of Voltaire's thought to

the Enlightenment and his enormous productivity make him the central figure of this age.

Voltaire. *Candide, or All for the Best*. With 10 etchings by Clara Tice. New York: J. E. Zonen for Bennett Libraries, Inc., 1927.

## Julien Offray de La Mettrie (1709-1751)

Few other adversaries of crown and cloth inspired quite the same degree of shock and horror as did Julien Offroy de La Mettrie. An army physician, he was very conscious of the workings of the body and in no way inclined to credit a separate soul. His caustic satires caused him to take refuge in Leiden, where in 1748 his *L'Homme Machine* was published. Descartes' assertion that animals are machines was amplified and extended to humans as well. Only the accident of language differentiates men from beasts, who indeed reason and must be granted a soul if man is to be assigned such. From his materialistic views La Mettrie drew a hedonistic ethic that exalted self-love and the pleasures of the senses. Such a man was bound to appeal to Frederick the Great, who invited him to Potsdam, made him a member of his Berlin Academy, and relished enormously his dissolute, witty conversation.

La Mettrie, Julien Offray de. *Man a Machine*. Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Co., 1912.

## Jean Claud Helvétius (1715-1771)

Of Germanic-Swiss origin, Jean Claude Helvétius was the son of a doctor who became physician to Louis XV's queen, Marie Leszynska. Wealthy from an early age, he retired to a country estate to cultivate philosophy. *De l'Esprit* (1758) surprisingly received the approval of the censor but was immediately attacked by church and state, publicly burned, and discreetly retracted by its author; it became the most widely read of all the books that undermined orthodox Christian doctrine.

Helvétius amplified his philosophy in *De l'Homme* (1772). Believing that ideas are derived from sensations (as in Locke), Helvétius saw egotism as the font of all action, advocated hedonism and religious tolera-

tion and preached racial and individual equality, in these respects being the most radical of the philosophes. Found in the Special Collection's copy is the condemnation of Helvétius by the Archbishop of Paris.

Helvétius, Jean Claud. *De L'Esprit*. Paris: Durand, 1758.

### Baron Paul Henri Dietrich D'Holbach (1723-1789)

Settling in Paris after the War of the Austrian Succession, Baron Paul Henri Dietrich D'Holbach married into a family of financiers, and became, like Helvétius, a famous host for uninhibited intellectuals. Fascinated by science he contributed articles to the *Encyclopédie* and considered the Church and especially religious control of education as the great barrier to human advancement. Volume after volume flowed from his pen, including *Christianisme Devoilé*, (London 1756 [i.e. 1761]) attributed on the title page to "the late M. Boulanger," and *Système de la Nature* (Amsterdam, 1770) bearing the name of Mirabaud, secretary of the French Academy and ten years deceased, a transparent ruse. In the latter book, an even more scorching indictment of Christianity, D'Holbach described man as merely another animal in the scheme of nature, subject to an unyielding determinism. Condemned by the clergy and the Parlement of France, its author sought out but never betrayed, the *Système*, smuggled in from Holland, was read throughout France.

Holbach, Paul Henri. *Système de la Nature, ou Des Loix du Monde Physique et du Monde Moral*. London, 1770.

## CASE 4

### THE GREAT ENCYCLOPEDIAS of RATIONALISM

### Pierre Bayle (1647-1706)

Son of a Huguenot minister, Bayle was an apt classical scholar, sent to the nearby Jesuit University of Toulouse to further his education. Here he was so enthusiastically converted to Catholicism that he tried to sway his family. In hopes that he would become a minister, he was sent to the Calvinist University of Geneva where he read Descartes and lost faith in all the Christian sects. In 1681, Bayle moved to Rotterdam where the Dutch Republic allowed a relative refuge for independent thought. As a professor of history and philosophy, living a life with very simple wants, Bayle was able to write extensive works that undermined foundations of faith. At first they were published anonymously: *Pensées Diverses sur la Comète* (1682) assailed not only superstitions but belief in divine warnings regarding comets, saying they moved by fixed, natural laws. He went on to state that other beliefs might be similarly questioned, e.g., if atheism is considered the cause of crime, one must suspect Christians to be secret atheists; a merciful Providence ensures that atheists lead exemplary lives.

In 1686, aroused by the formal revocation of the Edict of Nantes and the sufferings of his family in France, Bayle exposed the hypocrisy of persecutors who use the words of the parables of Jesus for justification (*Commentaire Philosophique sur ces Paroles de Jesus-Christ: "Contrains-les d'entrer"*). He asked why, if we grant the state the right to enforce unity of belief, we should blame the Roman emperors for persecuting the Christians? He went beyond Locke in urging freedom of worship or non-worship for Jews, Mohammedans, pagans, and free thinkers.

Bayle's enemies succeeded in having him dismissed from his Rotterdam professorship via "the Protestant Inquisition," as he termed the proceeding. He took consolation in devoting all his long working hours to his remarkable encyclopedia, the *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique* (1697). Bayle did not attempt universal coverage in his learned disquisitions, but collected theories, expounded rival opinions, and pointed out contradic-

tions. Many of the most wounding shafts were in fine print notes to the main articles, often undoing the effect of the orthodoxy in the articles themselves.

Attracted by his satirical style as well as the enormous erudition displayed in citation of authorities, readers bought out the 2600-page first edition. It was, of course, bitterly attacked by the clergy for "indecent expressions and questions, a great many obscene quotations, and offensive remarks on religious subjects." But students stood in line to read it in the Mazarin Library, and it was so widely distributed as to be estimated the major philosophic source of the following French Enlightenment. Diderot hailed Bayle as "the most redoubtable exponent of skepticism in either ancient or modern times."

Bayle, Pierre. *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique*. 5th edn. Amsterdam, Compagnie des libraires, 1734.

### ***Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire Raisoné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers*. 17 vols. 1751-1772.**

The *Encyclopédie* is the most potent work ever devised to challenge the assumptions of the prevailing social order. First originated as a French translation and enlargement of the lauded Chambers' *Cyclopaedia* (London, 1728), the project received a complete change in direction when Denis Diderot was appointed editor in 1747. Diderot decided on a completely new work that would emphasize science, technology, and advanced thinking. The prospectus of D'Alembert enlisted broad scientific, literary, and financial support, and the handsome first volume, in which heresies were not so blatant, was well received, accolades coming from the Jesuits. However, Volume II's article on "Certitude" was written by the skeptical Abbé De Prades, already fugitive from France at the court of Frederick the Great; his dissertation at the Sorbonne had been revoked because natural causes were adduced for the miracles of Christ. Each succeeding volume drew more praise, subscribers, and angry condemnations until the *Encyclopédie* was outlawed by the Council of State (1759) after the appearance of the inflammatory Volume VII. At great risk and with much heartening of his fearful colleagues Diderot had volumes VIII-XVII printed with a false imprint of Neuchâtel. Fortunately, the chief censor, Malesherbes, was an admirer of the *Encyclopédie* and worked behind the scenes to placate the authorities and aid its surreptitious publication. Catherine the Great and Frederick the

Great offered to complete it in their countries, so prestigious had it become.

The general philosophic tone of the *Encyclopédie* was to praise the scientific method, to ridicule established religion as superstition, and to advocate enlightened monarchs who would abolish aristocratic and clerical privileges, stimulate free economic enterprise, sponsor the sciences, abolish corruption and torture, and bring about an atmosphere of tolerance and inquiry. Its importance can scarcely be overstated; it is considered a prime cause for the French Revolution. Brunetière, noted for his reactionary political and religious views, pays this tribute: It was "the goal to which everything preceding it was tending, the origin of everything that followed it, and consequently the true center for any history of ideas in the eighteenth century."

Diderot, Denis and Jean d'Alembert. *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire Raisoné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers*. Paris, Briasson 1751—65 [i.e., Geneva: C.J. Panckoucke, etc. 1772-74].

### **Jean D'Alembert (1717-1783)**

Shortly after birth Jean D'Alembert was abandoned on the steps of a church by his mother, a fugitive from the convent and later the famous hostess of a brilliant salon, Mme de Tencin. Traced by his soldier father, D'Alembert was acknowledged and eventually given an income. He remained, however, at the home of his beloved foster parents for forty-seven years. Because of his mathematical genius he became a member of the Académie Royale des Sciences at age twenty-four. To launch the *Encyclopédie*, D'Alembert composed the eloquent "Discours Préliminaire," describing the fecund intellectual life of Europe from the Renaissance as the necessity for the new enterprise. Officially D'Alembert was responsible for the uncontroversial mathematics articles in the *Encyclopédie*, but unwittingly brought about its suppression with his article on Geneva in Volume VII; here he declared that Geneva's official Calvinism masked deistic views and a growing hedonism. Terrified by the possibility of imprisonment or worse, D'Alembert severed his connection with the *Encyclopédie* but returned to contribute again in the surreptitiously published volumes. His scientific contributions were chiefly important studies of the laws of motion. A confirmed agnostic, D'Alembert was a natural ally in Voltaire's war against the church, contributing his *Histoire de la Destruction des Jésuites* (1765) after their expulsion from France, a judicious rather than merely triumphant account.

## Denis Diderot (1713-1784)

Born near Dijon into a cutler's family, Diderot, believing he had a priestly vocation, was enrolled in Jesuit schools, but after receiving his master's degree, switched to law and a variety of transitory occupations and married despite opposition from both families. His first book, *Pensées Philosophiques* (1740), published anonymously, espoused deistic ideas and reviled Catholic doctrine; burned by the public executioner at the order of the Paris Parlement, it sold well and was translated into German and Italian. Considering what ideas a blind person would derive from his impressions, *Lettre sur les Aveugles* revealed Diderot's vivid imagination and suggested a Braille-like alphabet as well as making bold attacks on law and prudish morality; this earned him a stretch in the Bastille. Assuming the editorship of the *Encyclopédie* occupied and exhausted him for almost twenty years.

A brilliant conversationalist who starred in the salons, Diderot struck off many fine pieces which never saw publication in his lifetime. *The Dream of d'Alembert*, written 1769, has brilliant insights into psychology as well as interesting speculations about design in the universe and human drives in sexuality. Considered Diderot's masterpiece, *Rameau's Nephew*, first translated from the manuscript in 1820 by Goethe, is a story in which a real-life outcast expresses his pessimistic views of both nature and civilization. With his delight in the subject and his command of language, Diderot became the first notable art critic of France. Turning to the drama, Diderot felt that between high tragedy and low comedy lay a vast unexplored middle ground. His own plays about the bourgeoisie are marred by moralizing speeches, but they clearly point the way to such successful Bürgentragedien as Lessing's *Minna von Barnhelm* and Schiller's *Kabale und Liebe*. Given human nature, Diderot's most widely read book has been *Les Bijoux Indiscrets*, in which jewels reveal the boudoir secrets of the women who wore them. Although Voltaire remains the great exemplar of the French Enlightenment, Diderot possesses the most fascinating variety of works, the product of a dazzling, protean intelligence.

## CASE 5

### ROUSSEAU and INDIVIDUALISM DARWIN and MILL

#### Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778)

The writings of the other philosophes bred disaffection. It remained for Rousseau to give a faith to the coming Revolution. A lonely, motherless child in Calvinist Geneva, he developed strong feelings of inferiority and guilt, which were aggravated by his inability to succeed in a variety of employments. Reaching Paris in 1742 he became acquainted with Diderot and his circle but failed to receive recognition as a writer or inventor of a system of musical notation.

In 1749 the Academy of Dijon sponsored a prize contest on whether the renascence of the sciences and arts had contributed to the enhancement of morals. In a burst of eloquence which he attributed to a sudden vision, Rousseau traced mankind's ills to civilization and won the prize. His ideas of idyllic primitive society, corrupted by the development of the state, were developed in the ensuing *Discours sur l'Origine et les Fondemens de l'Inégalité parmi les Hommes* (1755), after which his fame and egalitarianism made him the center of continuing controversy. Rousseau maintained that the compassionate natural man had been corrupted by society's institutions which transform him into a selfish, hostile being, alienated from nature and at war with his own best impulses. In his article on "Economie Politique" in the *Encyclopédie*, he preached that the individual's tragic alienation could be cured by the creation of a true society in which the individual is sublimated into a communal self, the font of true liberty and social development. His *Profession de Foi du Vicaire Savoyard*, which accompanied *Emile* (1762), caused an official order for his arrest. The faith of the Savoyard vicar consisted of ministering to the needs of his parish, while rejecting the inspiration of the Bible and all religious doctrines; he maintained that God can be felt but not known—the natural religion for mankind. During his last years he wrote *Les Rêveries du Promeneur Solitaire* and *Les Confessions*, both published posthumously, in which his searing honesty and fervor, couched



in mellifluous phrases, made him a father of the Romantic Movement, which excited individual rebellion against the dictates of law, custom, and religion.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Discours sur l'Origine et les Fondemens de l'Inégalité Parmi les Hommes*. Amsterdam: M. M. Rey, 1755.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Les Confessions de J. J. Rousseau, Suivies des Rêveries du Promeneur Solitaire*. Geneva, 1782.

## Sylvain Maréchal (1750-1803)

A literary person who found fulfillment in the French Revolution, Sylvain Maréchal obtained a very congenial position at the Mazarin Library through his charming Anacreontic verse but lost it through his *Livre Echappé au Déluge* (1784), which mocked the style of the Old Testament. In 1788 he published *L'Almanach des Honnêtes Hommes*, an interesting prefiguration of the Revolutionary calendar, in which days associated with eminent men were substituted for saints' days - it was burned by the public executioner. But just as Jesus Christ appeared cheek-by-jowl with Epicurus, Maréchal denounced the September massacres, insisted on freedom of religion and the press, and constantly pleaded at the risk of his own safety for royalists and believers.

After Thermidor, Maréchal collaborated with Prudhomme on *Les Crimes de la Revolution* (1794). His friendship with "Gracchus" Babeuf led him to compose the *Manifeste des Egaux*, but he was not arrested or prosecuted in the government's action against the Babeuf conspiracy, where his friends were guillotined. His fecund literary production continued: *Pensées Libres sur les Prêtres* (1798); *Correctif à la Gloire de Napoléon* (1798); *Dictionnaire des Athées Anciens et Modernes* (1800); *Projet d'un Loi Portant Defense d'Apprendre à Lire aux Femmes* (1801), the last a satire that backfired and, taken seriously, drew angry replies. In his retirement Maréchal labored on his final work, the very rare *De la Vertu*, published posthumously. In this book he discussed the knotty problems of maintaining morals and ethics in a free society with no established religion.

Considering his readiness to challenge opinion, no matter how powerful, Maréchal led a charmed life. He may have been regarded as too soft-hearted to be a revolutionary or too learned and bookish, with his fifteen-hour working day, to be taken at all seriously, a kind of defrocked and declassed librarian.

Maréchal, Sylvain. *Dictionnaire des Athées Anciens et Modernes*. Paris: Chez Grabit, 1800.

## Charles Darwin (1809-1873)

Charles Darwin was born into a distinguished English family. His grandfather, Dr. Erasmus Darwin, had won attention in several fields and even promulgated a theory of evolution by specialization that anticipated Lamarck. His mother was the daughter of Josiah Wedgewood. His youth, however, had shown no special promise when in 1831 he shipped as a naturalist for a five year voyage on the HMS Beagle. Observing the Canary Islands, Patagonia, Tierra del Fuego, the Galapagos Islands, and parts of Oceania stirred such questions in Darwin's mind as the interrelationship between closely related but different species of birds in neighboring habitats. His acquaintance with Charles Lyell's (1797-1875) study of sedimentation had already convinced him of the millions of years in earth's existence. But it took years of long and patient study before Darwin had assembled enough data for his theory of evolution by natural selection. Given his perfectionism, the publication would have been postponed but for the reception of a letter from Alfred Russel Wallace (1823-1913), who had derived an identical theory from studies of animal life in Malaysia and Australasia.

The two papers were read together at the Linnaean Society meeting in 1858 and published later that year, but the storm broke next year when Darwin published *On the Origin of Species by Natural Selection*. The immutability of species had been a cardinal doctrine of believers in all sects; more importantly, Darwin did not exempt man from his theory. The process of natural selection also contradicted the specific examples used in the theological argument for God's existence by design. Darwin's further researches resulted in seminal books on fertilization and motion in plants and somatic changes in animals and plants under domestication. *The Descent of Man* (1870) was naturally found more inflammatory, but the battle lines had long

been drawn.

From his almost pampered seclusion in Down, Darwin refused to respond to his foes, but immediately he had able lieutenants who enthusiastically entered the fray. At the 1860 meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, Samuel Wilberforce, Bishop of Oxford, taunted Thomas Henry Huxley, asking him if he wanted to trace his ape ancestry through his father or mother. Huxley replied that he would not be ashamed to be descended from an ape but would be ashamed of an ancestor who used great gifts and eloquence in the service of falsehood. Huxley was the foremost polemicist for Darwin in England, Asa Gray in the United States; but in every country, Darwin's theory found its defenders, and, more importantly, ready acceptance. The civilized world had gradually been prepared for rational doubts of the literal veracity of the Bible. Scientific researches since Darwin have merely amplified examples of his general theory.

Darwin, Charles. *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or, The Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*. London: J. Murray, 1859.

### John Stuart Mill (1806-1873)

One of the greatest logicians, John Stuart Mill was raised by his father, James Mill, the utilitarian philosopher, in a household completely devoted to rationalism. His father's regimen was so strict that the children learned lessons on their walks and were not allowed play time. A child prodigy, Mill read Greek at three and by twelve was master of many languages as well as science and mathematics; he began authorship at that age. The unrelenting pursuit of knowledge, however, brought on nervous breakdowns; only the poetry of Wordsworth was able to give meaning to his life. While adhering to determinism, he acknowledged the subjective validity of free will. In addition to his work in science and economics, social problems greatly interested Mill. Falling in love and living with a married woman whose husband cheerfully accepted him helped to complete Mill's liberation from conventional views.

From 1835 to 1840, Mill served as part owner and virtual editor of the influential *London Review* and agreed in the 1860s to run for Parliament and be a guide to reform legislation for the liberal and radical groups. He

excelled in giving precision to an idea, and his writings are noted both for their lucidity and profundity. Besides his eloquent autobiography, Mill's most frequently read essays, never out of print, have been *On the Subjection of Women* and *On Liberty*. The latter is a masterly disquisition on freedom of thought, speech, and action, in which liberty is given full rein unless it causes physical harm to another or injury to property; it has served as the guide post of civil libertarians to the present day.

Mill, John Stuart. *On Liberty*. London: J.W. Parker and Son, 1859.

## CASE 6

### DOUBT and IRRELIGION in 19TH CENTURY ENGLISH POETRY

In the mid-eighteenth century Alexander Pope, the greatest poet of his age, was grateful to Bishop Warburton for defending his "Essay on Man" from charges of deism. How much freer from theological strictures Great Britain had become with the passage of another hundred years is shown by Tennyson, the Poet Laureate and symbol of Victorian aspiration, whose *In Memoriam* (1850) contains the lines "There is more faith in honest doubt/Believe me, than in half the creeds." Tennyson's friend, Edward Fitzgerald, created the lastingly popular "Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam," a world of hedonism inspired by philosophic skepticism. Matthew Arnold, poet and critic, the prominent intellectual voice of Victorianism, evinced a shattered faith. Before the end of the century, Housman embraced stoic endurance in his agnostic view of the world, defying law, convention, and religion. Earlier, among the romantics, Shelley was an outspoken atheist, having been expelled from Oxford for declaring its necessity. Later in the century Swinburne's attacks on Christianity aroused horror among the devout. A vital part of humanistic education, these poets contributed greatly to what Joseph Wood Krutch defined as "the modern temper." Shelley had declared "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world."

Shelley, Percy Bysshe. *The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*. London: Published for the Julian editions by E. Benn; New York: C. Scribner, 1927.

Khayyam, Omar. *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*. New York: Random House, 1947.

Swinburne, Algernon Charles. *Selections from A.C. Swinburne*. London: Heinemann, 1919.

Arnold, Matthew. *Poems*. London: Macmillan & Co., 1869.

Housman, A.E. *Collected Poems and Selected Prose*. London. A. Lane, Penguin Press, 1988.

## CASE 7

### AMERICAN FREETHINKERS

#### Abner Kneeland (1774-1844)

A sixth generation American, Abner Kneeland was born in Gardener, Massachusetts, to Congregationalist parents. He worked as a carpenter, a schoolmaster and preached in the Baptist Church. Kneeland left the Baptists due to his belief in the doctrine of the "restitution of all things" and in 1805 became an ordained Universalist minister. In 1816, after a brief respite from preaching he reentered the ministry and settled in New Hartford, New York. He built two churches in Philadelphia and became a fan and friend of Robert Owen, who lectured there on social and ethical issues.

Kneeland's growing rationalism led him to become a frequent contributor to *Free Enquirer* and to edit the *Olive Branch and Christian Inquirer*, a newspaper devoted to "free inquiry, pure morality and rational

Christianity." In 1829, after inviting Frances Wright, the freethinker and labor and women's rights advocate, to speak to his congregation, he requested, and was granted, permission to withdraw himself from the fellowship of Universalists.

Kneeland went to Boston and began lecturing on Rationalism, leading a group called the First Society of Free Enquirers, and founded the *Boston Investigator*, the first Rationalist journal in the United States. He was tried in January, 1834, for publishing "a certain scandalous, impious, obscene, blasphemous and profane libel of and concerning God." He was convicted and appealed the conviction. After two mistrials he was again convicted. Four years after the first trial the appeal was lost and he served sixty days in the Suffolk County jail. One hundred and seventy names were signed to a petition for pardon, including those of Theodore Parker, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and William Lloyd Garrison. No action was taken, however, and Kneeland served his time. While in jail, Kneeland wrote and published a review of his own trial, conviction, and imprisonment.

After his release, Kneeland resigned as editor of the *Boston Investigator* and moved west to Salubria, Iowa, to join a colony planned by the First Society of Free Enquirers. The colony project never came to fruition, but Kneeland stayed on the farm until his death in 1844 at the age of seventy-one. The *Investigator* was taken over by Horace Seaver and Josiah Mendum, who succeeded (where Kneeland failed) in joining forces with the radical movement. L.K. Washburn took on editorship after Seaver's death in 1889, and in 1904, after seventy-five years of publishing, the *Boston Investigator* merged with the *Truth Seeker*.

Kneeland, Abner. *An Introduction to the Defence of Abner Kneeland, Charged with Blasphemy Before the Municipal Court, in Boston, Mass., at the January Term in 1834*. Boston: Printed for the Publisher, 1834.

Parker, Samuel Dunn. *Report of the Arguments of the Attorney of the Commonwealth, at the Trials of Abner Kneeland, for Blasphemy, in the Municipal and Supreme Courts in Boston, January and May, 1834*. Boston: Beals, Homer, & Co., 1834.

## Robert Green Ingersoll (1833-1899)

Born in Dresden, New York, Ingersoll was the youngest of five children and the son of a Calvinist preacher, John Ingersoll, a controversial abolitionist. His mother, Mary Livingston Ingersoll, was also a vocal activist for the cause against slavery, but she died when Robert was a small child. After her death, John moved the family to Ohio, Wisconsin, and then Illinois, where they finally settled. Ingersoll was a humble man who did not like "biography" so the details of his childhood are vague, but at an early age he lost faith in the doctrines his father taught and thought the idea of hell so cruel he refused to believe it.

In addition to being an ardent abolitionist, Ingersoll was also a strong proponent of women's rights, proposing publicly "that all rights currently enjoyed by men in these United States be extended to all women by peaceful means." After being admitted to the bar he opened a successful law office with his brother, Ebon Clark, in Peoria, Illinois. He was called to military service and rose to the rank of Colonel during the Civil War. He married Eva Amelia Parker, also a free thinker, in 1862. They had two daughters and several grandchildren. Ingersoll was appointed Attorney General of Illinois in 1867 and served in this capacity until 1869.

Though Thomas Huxley, the English scientist and essayist, coined the term "agnostic," Ingersoll adopted it for himself. He began speaking publicly on agnosticism. His charm and wit, and his secure home life protected him from being denounced by "respectable" members of society. Because of his exceptional oratorical skills he became a highly respected and influential man. It was believed that had he renounced his agnosticism he could have become governor of Illinois and perhaps even a candidate for president.

Ingersoll's switch from the Democrat to the Republican party was a result of his split with the Democrats over the issues of slavery and the Dred Scott decision. He was appointed a delegate to the Republican convention in Cincinnati in 1876, and was asked to give the nominating speech for James G. Blaine. Although Blaine lost the nomination, Ingersoll's eloquent speech was remembered by all whenever Blaine's name came up.

Ingersoll moved to Washington in 1879 and continued to lecture on religion. His most famous speeches, given many times to capacity crowds, were "The Gods" (1872); "Why I Am an Agnostic" (1896); and "About the

Holy Bible" (1894). He fell ill late in 1896 and retired from his law practice. He died three years later in Dobbs Ferry, New York, of heart disease. His obituary in the *Truth Seeker* (Aug. 5, 1899) eulogized him this way: "With his magnificent gifts Robert Ingersoll could have had any position in a republic he aspired to. Instead, he cast all behind him that he might be free."

Ingersoll, Robert G. *What is Religion?* Baltimore, Md.: Phoenix Publishing Co., ca. 1900.

## CASE 8

### BRITISH FREETHINKERS

#### George Jacob Holyoake (1817-1906)

The second of eleven children, George Jacob Holyoake was born in Birmingham to George and Catherine Holyoake. As a math teacher at the Birmingham Mechanics' Institute, he became a freethinker and a social reformer through his association with the Birmingham Owenites. In 1839 Holyoake married Eleanor Williams, by whom he had seven children.

The *Oracle of Reason* (the first openly atheistic English-language magazine) was Holyoake's medium for promoting atheism. When Charles Southwell was imprisoned for blasphemy in 1842, he took over as editor. Holyoake was also soon convicted of blasphemy and sentenced to six months in jail at Gloucester.

Holyoake tried without success to revive the failing *Oracle* after his release from prison. *The Movement*, bearing the motto from Jeremy Bentham, "Maximize morals, minimize religion," took its place in 1843, but in 1845 ceased publication. After moving to London, Holyoake began publishing *The Reasoner*, which became the most significant British freethought journal. It was in the pages of *The Reasoner* that Holyoake first invented and used the term "secularism." During this time, Holyoake embarked on several lecture tours throughout England and Scotland and by 1852 was heading more than twenty secularist societies.

Holyoake fell under sharp criticism by the radical secularists when he began to sympathize with the Christian socialists. With his brother Austin Holyoake (1827-1874) he founded Fleet Street House which published secular tracts. His failure to promote secularism as vigorously as others wished cost him the presidency of the London Secular Society in 1858, which appointed Charles Bradlaugh to lead its members. Holyoake's interest in freethought remained and he continued publishing *The Reasoner* until 1861. In 1882 he made a trip to the United States to promote the cooperative cause.

Holyoake, George Jacob. *The History of the Last Trial by Jury for Atheism in England: A Fragment of Autobiography*. London: J. Watson, 1851.

Holyoake, George Jacob. *Secularism, Scepticism, and Atheism. Verbatim Report of the Proceedings of a Two Nights Public Debate Between Messrs. G.J. Holyoake & C. Bradlaugh, Held at the New Hall of Science... London, on the Evenings of March 10 and 11, 1870*. London: Austin & Co., 1870.

*The Reasoner*, vol. 19, no. 28, October 7, 1855. Ed. G.J. Holyoake. London: Holyoake and Co.

*The Movement, and Anti-Persecution Gazette*, no. 36, 1845. Ed. G. J. Holyoake. London: G. Jacob Holyoake.

## Charles Bradlaugh (1833-1891)

The eldest of six children, Charles Bradlaugh was born in East London, amidst the radical and freethought views of the working classes. He was driven from his family home due to his refusal to cast aside his own doubts in the existence of a deity.

Bradlaugh began frequenting Warner Street Hall, the venue for local freethinkers. By 1850 he had written his first freethought pamphlet, *A Few Words on the Christian's Creed*, and that year gave his first public lecture. In 1855 Bradlaugh began using the pen name, "Iconoclast." It was in this same year that he married Susannah Lamb Hooper, the daughter of a freethinker. They had a daughter, Alice, the following year, another daughter, Hypatia, in 1858, and a son, Charles, in 1859. He took over the

editorship of the *Investigator*, a radical freethought biweekly paper. Within a year it ceased publication. He began editing the *National Reformer* in 1860, and founded the National Secular Society in 1866.

The National Secular Society continued to grow in influence and significance. Bradlaugh made three lecture tours to the United States between 1873 and 1875. He became a respected member of the House of Commons, and sat on several committees, sponsoring the Oaths Act, which extended the civil rights of freethinkers and secured the right to affirm, instead of taking an oath, in Parliament. He was an avid opponent of socialism, opposing both the Eight Hours Bill and the Employer's Liability Act, because they interfered with the rights of the individual. He resigned as president of the National Secular Society in 1890, passing it on to George William Foote (1850-1915). Bradlaugh died the following year, survived by his daughter, Hypatia, also an atheist, who, under her father's leadership, worked on the staff of the *National Reformer*, lectured on the freethought circuit, and served as director of the Rationalist Press Association.

Bradlaugh, Charles. *A Few Words About the Devil, and Other Biographical Sketches and Essays*. New York: A.K. Butts, 1874.

## Bertrand Russell (1872-1970)

The son of radical parents Viscount Amberly and Kate Stanley, who both died by the time he was four years old, Russell was raised by his wealthy paternal grandparents. His parents had, before their deaths, arranged for him to be raised by atheist guardians, including John Stuart Mill, but the courts set aside the decree. He was a skeptic from a very early age, relinquishing all belief in God and rejecting the idea of immortality after reading John Stuart Mill's autobiography.

An activist in the pacifist movement during World War I, Russell joined the militant No-Conscription Fellowship. He was tried and convicted for writing an anti-war pamphlet, but refused to pay the fine and was prepared to accept the jail sentence. (His friends paid his fine.) As a result of his conviction, he lost his lectureship at Trinity College. While his philosophy based on logic and mathematics made him an important influence, Russell became progressively radical, serving time in prison for writing an article which criticized the American forces in England. In the

1920s he published *Why I Am Not a Christian* (1927), *Skeptical Essays* (1928), and *Marriage and Morals* (1929), while continuing his research in mathematics and philosophy.

In 1938 Russell and his third wife, Patricia, and his children, moved to the United States, where he obtained a teaching position at City College of New York in 1940. An uproar ensued when he was fired because of his independent, rather than religious, views on sex, marriage, and child rearing. The New York Board of Higher Education was sued for offering employment to an alien atheist and proponent of free love. The case was upheld, and Russell lost his position with City College.

The 1940s and 50s saw Russell in a far better situation. He lectured in Europe, Asia, and the United States. After returning to England Russell earned the Order of Merit from Trinity in 1949 and won the Nobel Prize in literature in 1950. He became the first president of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, and two years later formed the more militant Committee of 100. He and his fourth wife, Edith, participated in the mass sit-down action in Whitehall in 1961, and were arrested in a demonstration later that year. Due to their advanced ages they were excused from serving their two-months' sentences. Conscious of the catastrophic destruction unleashed by a possible nuclear war, he continued his political activism until his death at the age of ninety-seven.

Russell, Bertrand. *Free Thought and Official Propaganda*. New York: B.W. Huebsch, Inc., 1922.

## WALL CASE I

### CONTINENTAL FREETHINKERS of the 18th and 19th CENTURIES

Portraits of Voltaire, Kant, Catherine the Great,  
Frederick the Great, and Rousseau.

## WALL CASE II

### AMERICAN FREETHINKERS

#### DeRobigne Mortimer Bennett (1818-1882)

Born in Springfield, New York, D.M. Bennett left home at fourteen and joined a Shaker community in New Lebanon, New York. During his thirteen-year stay at New Lebanon he studied pharmacology, learning the healing powers of roots, barks, and herbs, and eventually became the community's physician.

By the 1840s Bennett's faith began to waver. He left the Shakers in 1846 (his mother had left six years earlier) with his sister, her fiancé, and Mary Wicks, whom he married soon after. For the next quarter century he moved around often, to such towns as Louisville, Rochester (New York), Cincinnati, Kansas City, and Paris (Illinois) and became involved in several business ventures of varying successes. At the same time, his interest in freethought grew while he studied Paine's *Age of Reason* and the works of other freethinkers.

After being denied a voice in the Christian press because of his blasphemous letters in response to the local clergy, Bennett began publishing *The Truth Seeker*. The first issue, in 1873, consisted of all his own writings published under various pseudonyms, and had a run of 12,000. The magazine began as a monthly, but after removing to New York it gained in popularity and became a weekly beginning with volume 3 in 1876. Bennett also published many books and pamphlets under *The Truth Seeker* name.

Bennett often attacked in print the activities of Anthony Comstock, the young and ruthless postal inspector who was fond of snooping into the mail of private individuals. In 1877 Anthony Comstock set out to silence Bennett by "proving" that he was sending indecent matter through the mails in violation of the law. He requested, using a false name, Bennett's *An Open Letter to Jesus Christ* and A.B. Bradford's *How Do Marsupials Propagate Their Kind?* to be sent to him by mail. Although the initial case against Bennett was dismissed, Comstock persisted in his mission. He again used a false name and requested Ezra Heywood's *Cupid's Yokes*. Bennett was



eventually convicted, fined, and sent to prison for thirteen months. Haywood's pamphlet was not indecent and, therefore, did not fall under the statute, but despite a petition to President Rutherford B. Hayes, signed by 200,000 of Bennett's supporters, "the Christian ministers all over the country protested against the pardon of an Infidel." During his incarceration *The Truth Seeker* continued to be published. After his release, Bennett was given an enthusiastic reception in New York and sent as a U.S. delegate to the International Freethought Congress in Brussels. He wrote and published a series of letters based on the Congress and took a one-year trip around the world. Upon his return he was diagnosed with gastric fever and died December 6, 1882.

## The Truth Seeker (1873- )

Now in its 124th year, the *Truth Seeker* has had a varied and controversial history. After D.M. Bennett, Eugene MacDonald became the editor until his death in 1909, when his brother George took over until 1937. In 1930, Charles Lee Smith bought the *Truth Seeker*, after having helped to found, in 1925, the American Association for the Advancement of Atheism, which soon had over 3,000 members in over twenty chapters across the country. Keeping MacDonald on as editor of the *Truth Seeker*, Smith changed the format to a smaller one and the frequency from a weekly to a monthly. Although Smith was a valiant fighter in the cause against censorship of freethought ideas, serving jail time twice on blasphemy charges, relentlessly confronting the authorities, and constantly pushing legal limits, he was an anti-Semite and a racist. Articles espousing racial superiority began appearing in the magazine by the late 1930s. By the 1950s the racist tone was so apparent that many subscribers protested and canceled their subscriptions.

In 1964, Smith sold the magazine to James Hervey Johnson, but Johnson allowed Smith to stay on as editor, moving the magazine to San Diego. Johnson shared Smith's racist and anti-Semitic ideas, venerating him in an obituary published in the January, 1965, issue: "He had fearlessly criticized the organized Jews who rule the nation and oppress the intelligent whites. If the human race progresses, it will be by following the philosophy of Charles Smith." He continued to publish in that vein until his death in 1988.

In the August, 1988, issue, Bonnie Lange, the new publisher of the

*Truth Seeker*, memorialized Johnson for his thirty-year struggle for the cause of freethought, but not without condemning his hateful "bitter... preoccupation with anti-Semitism and racism...." She went on to clarify that, "Freethinkers have nothing to do with such un-American manifestations as hatred of Jews or Blacks."

*The Truth Seeker*, vol. 2, no. 19, June 1, 1875. Ed. D.M. Bennett. New York: The Truth Seeker Co.

*The Index*, vol.1, no.1, January 1, 1870. Ed. F.E. Abbott. Toledo, Ohio: The Index Association.

*The Little Freethinker*, vol. 5, no. 1, December 1897. Ed. E.D. Slenker. Chicago, Ill.: H.G. Green.

## Ernestine Louise Rose (1810-1892)

The daughter of a Jewish rabbi, Ernestine Louise Sismondi Potowski was born in Poland. Her father educated her at home, where he encountered a precocious child, quick witted, curious, and "a rebel at the age of five." She often asked him questions which challenged the rules of Judaism, and refused to accept some of its long-held traditions, including the Jewish view of women.

Ernestine was sixteen when her mother died. Rabbi Potowski found it increasingly difficult to raise his rebellious daughter, by now considered a heretic. Within a short time he entered her into a marriage contract with a man who fully intended to enjoy the substantial dowry she inherited from her mother. Despite a centuries-old custom, Ernestine refused to marry a man she didn't love, but her father would not void the contract. She went directly to the man's house and pleaded with him to nullify the contract. He not only refused, but told her that under the terms of the contract he was still entitled to her dowry even if she didn't marry him. This injustice appalled her and she sought legal recourse in a court of law, a rare occurrence for a Jew. Acting as her own attorney the 16-year old Ernestine impressed the High Tribunal of the Regional Polish Court with her case. The judges rendered a decision in her favor and granted Ernestine her right to ownership.

Ernestine went to Berlin and found a repression not so different from the one she left behind in Poland. The movements of Polish Jews were restricted and they were not allowed to remain in Germany unless a Prussian citizen and property holder granted security. Although Ernestine could have applied for such security, she decided instead to go before the Prussian king to argue the matter for all Jews. The king was so impressed with her argument that although he did not abolish the decree, he granted her an exception to remain in Germany as long as she wanted and to engage in any business, both rare privileges for a Jew. She found a way to support herself by inventing a paper which, when burned, emitted a pleasant aroma.

The expression of liberal or radical political views in Germany was punished severely, and children were forced to work sixteen-hour days in factories. After two years of witnessing this oppression by the aristocracy in Berlin, Ernestine was ready to leave. She went to Holland and France briefly, before sailing to England in 1831. There she met Robert Owen and became involved in his circle of British reformers. In 1836 she married William Ella Rose, a silversmith and follower of Owen. Soon after, they moved to America and obtained U.S. citizenship.

Rose was also an ardent opponent of slavery and religious fundamentalism. Her chief contribution to freethought was her pamphlet, *A Defence of Atheism*, published in Boston in 1861. In it, she considers "... no place too holy, no subject too sacred for man's earnest investigation." She lectured for the Society for Moral Philanthropists (also known as the "Tammany Hall infidels") and was a frequent contributor to the *Boston Investigator*. She continued a life of radical activity, but by 1865 her health was diminishing. Ernestine and William traveled to Europe, eventually deciding to settle in England. They never returned to America. William died in 1882 and Ernestine ten years later. They are both buried in Highgate Cemetery, London.

Rose, Ernestine L. *A Defence of Atheism: Being a Lecture delivered in Mercantile Hall, Boston, April 10, 1861*. Boston: J.P. Mendum, 1889.

## Voltairine de Cleyre (1866-1912)

Born in the small town of Leslie, Michigan, Voltairine was the youngest of three daughters of Hector De Claire, a socialist and freethinker from Lille, France, and Harriet Billings De Claire, a New England puritan and the daughter of an abolitionist.

Voltairine attended school in St. Johns until she was twelve years old. She then went to live with her father, who enrolled her in a convent school in Sarnia, Ontario. Although she protested and despised the strict regimen of the school, her father, knowing his daughter was gifted, hoped it would provide her with a superior academic education, as well as instill in her a sense of refinement and discipline. The adjustment period was very difficult for Voltairine, but eventually she went on to head her class, although her independence and intellect caused her often to question God's existence. Eventually the nuns at the convent gave up trying to convert her. She graduated with the gold medal of the convent in 1883 and returned to her mother and sister in St. Johns, profoundly influenced by her years at the convent which helped develop a strength of character and shape her ideals for the rest of her life.

Back in St. Johns Voltairine gave lessons in French, music and penmanship, but life was difficult there for a well-educated girl of seventeen. After two years she moved in with an aunt in Greenville, Michigan, where freethought became predominant in her life. By the time she was twenty she had moved to Grand Rapids and began writing for the *Progressive Age*, a freethought weekly, and soon became its editor, eventually changing the spelling of her last name to "de Cleyre." Voltairine began lecturing on the freethought circuit in Michigan towns and soon gained a reputation for leaving "an immense impression" upon her audience, with lectures "richly studded with original thought." She continued to lecture throughout the Midwest and eastern states, while contributing articles to the *Boston Investigator*, *Freethinkers Magazine*, *The Truth Seeker*, and *Freethought*.

It was in December, 1887, while listening to a lecture by Clarence Darrow in Pittsburgh, that de Cleyre first discovered socialism. Thereafter, her writing and lectures took on a social awareness. Not long after this radical social awakening, she was met and ideologically challenged by a Russian anarchist named Mozersky, and began studying anarchist writings, including Benjamin Tucker's journal, *Liberty*. She felt that the socialists' conventional attitudes toward women and their ideas of political

collectivism did not make room for her nonconformist lifestyle and her political radicalism. To de Cleyre, anarchism and freethought were so closely connected that a distinction was indiscernible.

Due to de Cleyre's feminist views and her insistence on egalitarianism, her personal relationships with men were usually fraught with emotional upheaval. Although she had many lovers during her lifetime, she rejected all offers of marriage and refused to be confined to one lover, viewing monogamy and marriage as slavery. In a letter to Samuel Gordon in 1897, de Cleyre states, "I will not live with you, for if I do I suffer the tortures of owning and being owned." She moved to Philadelphia in 1889, and in 1890 she gave birth to her only child, Vermorel Elliott. Although she agreed to live for a short time with the father, James B. Elliott, her interest in motherhood was nonexistent, and she soon left her son with Elliott to continue her political activity. She would have little to do with him during his childhood, but he loved her intensely and later changed his name to Harry de Cleyre. They finally developed a warm relationship in the last few years of her life.

De Cleyre proceeded on the lecturing circuit, spending a year in Kansas lecturing for the Women's National Liberal Union, a freethought feminist group. In Philadelphia in 1892 she helped found the radical feminist group, the Ladies' Liberal League, continued to write for the *Boston Investigator* and *Lucifer The Light Bearer*, and also published poetry. On a lecture tour through England and Scotland in 1897, she met Peter Kropotkin.

Since de Cleyre would not accept money for her writings or lectures, she had to support herself by teaching English to immigrant Jews, and through this she became literate in Yiddish. Sometimes she converted her students to anarchism. In December, 1902, one of these converts, a deeply disturbed young man named Herman Helcher, shot de Cleyre three times at close range. She recovered slowly, refusing to identify him to the police (although he was caught and convicted anyway), and all the while urging her comrades to raise money for his defense. De Cleyre's health was poor throughout her life, and she suffered from severe earaches and throat problems. Although she never fully recovered from the shooting, she resumed her political activity, and also began writing for Emma Goldman's *Mother Earth*.

In the following years, De Cleyre became increasingly disillusioned about the prospects of creating a radical change in society. In addition to her hopes for the movement, her health had also deteriorated. In 1910 she

moved from Philadelphia to Chicago, thinking a change of location would lift her spirits. There she found a friendly home with anarchists Jacob and Anna Livshis. The move, however, did not help to revive her spirits, nor did her health improve. In the spring of 1911, the Mexican Revolution broke out, and de Cleyre's enthusiasm with it. She was inspired by the activities of Ricardo Flores Magón, and devoted all her attention to the cause. She began studying Spanish and was preparing a trip to Los Angeles to be closer to the battle, but died due to complications following an ear operation. A freethinker to the end, on her deathbed in the hospital, unable to utter a single word, "she grimaced to show her displeasure" as she saw a priest walk past her room.

De Cleyre, Voltairine. *The Gods and the People*. San Francisco: Free Society, ca. 1910.

De Cleyre, Voltairine. "Mary Wollstonecraft." Manuscript in author's hand, n.d.

De Cleyre, Voltairine. "Mary Wollstonecraft," in *Free Thought Magazine*, vol.14, June 1896, pp. 377-78.

Darrow, Clarence and Robert MacGowan. *Is Religion Necessary? Yes, Rev. Robert MacGowan, No, Clarence Darrow*. Girard, Kan.: Haldeman-Julius Publications, 1931.

Nineteenth century caricature depicting the struggle between believers in Darwinian evolution and defenders of the Bible. Robert Ingersoll, with sprouting horns, is behind the devil.

## CENTER WALL CASE

### Posters

American Atheists. "Free Religion's Prisoners." Poster, ca. 1980.

American Atheists. Madalyn Murray O'Hair, ca. 1975.

## WALL CASE III

### BRITISH FREETHINKERS

#### Annie Besant (1847-1933)

Born in London to an Irish mother and a half-Irish father, Annie Wood grew up in humble surroundings, and lived in poverty after the death of her father in 1852. In 1867 she married Frank Besant, vicar of Sibsey, Lincolnshire, and younger brother of the novelist Sir Walter Besant (1836-1901). Her religious faith began to deteriorate following her daughter's serious illness in 1871, and she was soon reading and writing deistic works. Besant obtained a separation from her husband in 1873 and left with her daughter. She continued writing tracts for Thomas Scott, a publisher of deistic works.

Besant joined the National Secular Society under the leadership of Charles Bradlaugh and in 1874 gave her first lecture, "The Political Status of Women" before an audience at the Old Street Hall of Science. Adopting the pseudonym "Ajax," she wrote a weekly column in the *National Reformer*. After being convicted with Bradlaugh for re-publishing Knowlton's *The Fruits of Philosophy*, Besant lost custody of her daughter, though the case was overturned on appeal. She was soon afterward promoted to subeditor of the *National Reformer* and appointed vice-president of the National Secular Society.

Besant continued her freethought activities, founding the Malthusian League in 1877, publishing her own work on birth control, *The Law of Population*, serving as coeditor of the *Reformer* and launching her own monthly, *Our Corner*, while assuming much of the lecturing and administrative responsibilities for Bradlaugh.

Her associations with George Bernard Shaw, John M. Robertson, and Edward Aveling led Besant in the direction of the socialist movement. She was able to convert a few freethinkers to socialism, but not Bradlaugh, who remained a steadfast individualist. Gradually Besant became less involved with the *Reformer* and the freethought movement and more active

with trade unionists. She joined the Social Democratic Federation in 1888 and was elected to the London School Board. She quit working with the National Secular Society altogether in 1890, when William Foote was nominated to succeed Bradlaugh.

Besant's attraction to theosophy around 1889 led her to India, where, in 1907 she was elected president of the Theosophical Society. Involved in the cause of Indian nationalism, she published several works on Indian politics and eastern religions. The centenary celebration of the National Secular Society (a few days after her death) honored her pioneer work.

*The National Reformer*, vol. 43, no. 19, 1884. London. Holyoake and Co.

#### Joseph McCabe (1867-1955)

Born to poor, Catholic, working-class parents in Macclesfield, Joseph McCabe entered the Gorton Franciscan Monastery at the age of 16. After becoming an ordained priest and being appointed professor of philosophy at Forest Gate and at Louvain University in Belgium, McCabe began to doubt the strict doctrines of his religion. He isolated himself in his room for several days while he contemplated and weighed the evidence in the arguments for and against the existence of God and immortality. On Christmas Eve, 1895, he determined to abandon the priesthood.

In 1897 McCabe wrote *Twelve Years in a Monastery*, an autobiographical work which drew over 100,000 readers. He continued his writing career with several biographies, including those of George Bernard Shaw, Robert Owen, and George Jacob Holyoake. In 1902, McCabe's translation of Ernst Haeckel's *Riddle of the Universe* earned him much recognition throughout Britain and the U.S. McCabe's support of the Soviet Union and his hope that socialism and communism would emerge triumphant by 1999 resulted in a series of publications from the 1930s to the 1950s, including *The Next 50 Years*. (1950). McCabe believed the Roman Catholic Church was an enemy of the people and their progress, and he championed many unpopular causes. He was considered a great scholar, writing on many diverse topics, and delivered innumerable lectures for the South London Ethical Society, the National Secular Society, and several other freethought groups around the country.

After many years of writing for the British Rationalist Association, he was expelled from the group in 1928 for his criticism of Bradlaugh and support of Holyoake. He eventually reconciled with the B.R.A. and resumed writing for them. He found an encouraging reception with the American publisher, E. Haldeman-Julius, who called McCabe, "... the most loyal and enthusiastic worker for Freethought, Rationalism, Atheism and Materialism...." Haldeman-Julius published 121 Little Blue Books by McCabe, which sold over 2.3 million copies, and 122 of McCabe's larger books, which sold almost 2 million copies. Joseph McCabe died at the age of eighty-eight, "a rebel to his last breath."

McCabe, Joseph. *Is the Position of Atheism Growing Stronger?* (The Free Thinker's Library, no. 2) Girard, Kan.: Haldeman-Julius Co., 1936.

Haldeman-Julius, E. *What Can a Free Man Believe?* (The Joseph McCabe Magazine, vol.2, no.1) Girard, Kan.: Haldeman-Julius Publications, 1931.

## WALL CASE IV

### FREETHOUGHT ASSOCIATIONS

American Association for the Advancement of Atheism. *Second Annual Report, 1927.* New York, 1928.

American Secular Union and Freethought Federation. "Certificate of Annual Membership," 1896.

Indiana Rationalist Association. Program, 5th Annual Congress, November 8 and 9, 1913.

Free Religious Association. *First Annual Report of the Executive Committee.* Boston, 1868.

Atheist Forum. Handbill for series of meetings. Chicago, 1931.

"Frank Sinatra's Religion." Excerpt from Frank Sinatra interview, *Playboy Magazine*, February 1963. Reprint, n.d.

The American Secular Union. Informational Pamphlet. Philadelphia, n.d.

Burns, Tom. *Eleven Indictments of the Bible.* (Free Thinkers Library, vol. 1, no. 1, July 1915) Portland, Ore.: T. Burns.

## WALL CASE V

### AMERICAN FREETHINKERS of the 20TH CENTURY

#### E. Haldeman-Julius (1889-1951)

Emanuel Julius was born in Philadelphia to Jewish working-class parents from Odessa. After leaving school at age thirteen to help his family as a wage-earner, Emanuel's education really started. Although he first began reading dime novels, he soon encountered the writings of Paine and Ingersoll and became a freethinker, while continuing to read voraciously.

Julius left Philadelphia for New York at age seventeen, after his conversion to socialism. Soon after, he began working as a journalist for the *New York Evening Call* and over the next few years worked on newspapers in Milwaukee, Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York. In 1915 Julius left New York for Girard, Kansas to work on the *Appeal to Reason*, the most widely read socialist newspaper of its time. The *Appeal* was suffering as a result of the suicide in 1912 of its founder, J.A. Wayland. In addition, its vacillation over the issue of the U.S. entry into World War I caused a drop in circulation.

In June of 1916 Julius married Marcet Haldeman, feminist and niece of Jane Addams of Hull House, and the daughter of an affluent banker. The couple combined their last names to form Haldeman-Julius. Securing a loan from his wife, Emanuel bought the *Appeal* and its printing plant in 1919. He had always dreamed of being able to publish inexpensive, pocket-sized pamphlets and provide them to the masses. He began by publishing *The Rubáiyat of Omar Khayyám* and Oscar Wilde's *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* in what he called the "People's Pocket Series." He continued to print works of great popular appeal, classical literature, socialist propaganda, sex education and freethought materials, and met with huge success. In 1924 the series title became "Little Blue Books," and the following year he launched another series, "Big Blue Books." He continued to publish the *Appeal to Reason*, but changed its title to the *Haldeman-Julius Weekly* in 1923 and to the *American Freeman* in 1929. By that year he had published nearly 1,000 titles. He went into mass production and soon was printing 10,000 Little Blue Books per hour. Included in his author list were such notables

as Margaret Sanger, Clarence Darrow, Will Durant, H.G. Wells, Upton Sinclair, Havelock Ellis, Joseph McCabe, and Bertrand Russell. Because access to libraries during this time was difficult, especially in rural areas, the Little Blue Books were a powerful influence, reaching prisons, hospitals, military barracks, and homes. Sources vary, but figures for total copies printed during his life range from 300,000,000 to 500,000,000.

Brown, Ethel. *Confessions of a Minister's Daughter*. (Little Blue Book, no. 1394) Girard, Kan.: E. Haldeman Julius, 1929.

Is "Knowledge" of God a Delusion? A Debate Between Professor Eddington and E. Haldeman-Julius. (Little Blue Book, no. 1598) Girard, Kan.: Haldeman Julius Publications, ca. 1935.

Haldeman-Julius, E. *Why I Believe in Freedom of Thought*. (Little Blue Book, no. 1551) Girard, Kan.: Haldeman-Julius Publications, 1930.

Haldeman-Julius, E. *Why I Do Not Fear Death*. (Little Blue Book, no. 1545) Girard, Kan.: Haldeman-Julius Publications, ca. 1935.

#### Madalyn Murray O'Hair (1919- )

Born in Pittsburgh, Madalyn Mays claimed to have become atheist at the age of twelve, after reading the Bible from cover to cover. She attended the University of Toledo and the University of Pittsburgh, and graduated from Ashland College in Ohio in 1948. She received a law degree in 1953 from South Texas College of Law and a PhD from the Minnesota Institute of Philosophy in 1971.

Madalyn Murray filed suit in 1962 against the Baltimore school system claiming the presence of Bible readings and recitation of the Lord's Prayer in her son William's school was unconstitutional. When the case reached the Supreme Court it was joined with Schempp v. School District of Abington Township (Pa.). In 1963 the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the plaintiffs, banning government-sponsored prayer from public schools. (Volunteer prayer in schools is still the subject of much debate).



After the Supreme Court decision a legal entanglement ensued and the Murrays fled first to Hawaii, then to Mexico to avoid what Madalyn was sure would be an unfair trial. Eventually all charges against her were dropped and she returned to the U.S. with her two sons and her new husband, Richard O'Hair.

The O'Hairs settled in Austin, Texas, where Madalyn formed the Society of Separationists, known today as American Atheists. She won tax exemptions for her group and began publishing a magazine called *American Atheist*. She brought and lost a number of lawsuits relating to the practice of religious worship in government, and won only one, in Texas, abolishing the requirement that officeholders must believe in God. She also appeared on radio and television shows as the most outspoken and vocal contemporary atheist. Her son, William, became a Christian and has written a book about his early life with his mother.

Over the years Madalyn has gained the dubious reputation of being one who insists on having full control of her organization, and is seen by many as an irrational person. There have been personal conflicts with many of those with whom she associated. She is a charismatic leader who does not take kindly to being confronted or contradicted.

In September, 1995, Madalyn Murray O'Hair, her son Jon Garth Murray (the president of American Atheists) and her granddaughter Robin Murray O'Hair (editor of *American Atheist*) all disappeared. No clues to their whereabouts have been found and there is no discernible withdrawal of funds from the accounts of the organization. Meanwhile, American Atheists continues to be active under the leadership of Ellen Johnson.

American Atheists. Program for 10th Annual National Convention. Detroit, 1980.

O'Hair, Madalyn Murray. *Why I Am an Atheist*. 2nd rev. edn. Austin, Tex.: American Atheist Press, 1991.

American Atheists. "History Lesson." Poster, ca. 1970.

## NOTICES:

### LECTURE

"Heretic Heroines: A History of Women Free Thinkers"

By Annie Laurie Gaylor

March 19, 1997, at 7 pm  
at the Special Collections Library

### CLOSING

The Special Collections Library will be closed  
during the first part of May, 1997 for sprinkler installation.  
Materials will be available for study only through reservations made  
before May 1. Call 764-9377 for more information.

### UPCOMING EXHIBITION

William Faulkner (1897-1962): A Centennial Exhibition  
An exhibition highlighting materials from the  
Irwin T. and Shirley Holtzman William Faulkner Collection  
Mid-September - November, 1997

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